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## Forklift drivers compete in safety rodeo

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The Iron Horse Rodeo, at Lansing Community College's West Campus on Tuesday, was short on lassos and had no bucking broncos, but there was a lot of steering.

Rather than riding livestock, competitors in this rodeo drive forklifts at area factories. The participants, approximately 30 people from 10 local companies, navigated a timed obstacle course that contained several safety challenges.

While many participants said they enjoyed having a day to compete rather than work in a factory, the rodeo organized by the Capital Area Manufacturing Council was more than fun and games.

"When there's an accident involving a fork lift, it damages a lot of goods and hurts people," said Tom Zander, service and training manager for Mid-State Industrial, a fork lift dealership and training center in Eaton Rapids.

"This event is important because employers are letting employees know that safety is important," he said.

That point was driven home to Howard Ware, a General Motors Corp. employee who took part in the event. Ware left the assembly line two years ago to take a position as a materials handler.

Ware said the day reminded him about the importance of safety.

"You have to be mindful of what you're doing at all times," he said. "I'm learning by being here today."

The job of the fork lift operator has gotten more demanding in recent years, as factories have moved to lean manufacturing systems, said Colin Chapman, a safety coordinator at Magnesium Products of America in Eaton Rapids and a judge at the rodeo.

"The biggest challenge today is that we have to learn to do more with fewer people," he said. "There is more equipment and people are doing more work in the same space they had to work in 15 years ago."